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*National Prosperity or Adversity dependent
upon the virtuous or vicious State of a
Nation.*

A
S E R M O N

Preached in the
PARISH-CHURCH
OF THE
HOLY TRINITY,
IN
C H E S T E R,

On *Wednesday, Feb. 4. 1740.*

B E I N G
The Day appointed by His MAJESTY'S
Royal Proclamation for a General FAST.

By WILLIAM SMITH, A. M.
Rector of the said Church.

L O N D O N:
Printed for P. POTTER, Bookseller in *Chester.*

National Property or Adversity dependent
upon the virtuous or vicious state of
Nation.

SEERMON

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PARISH-CHURCH

OF THE

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On Wednesday, Feb. 4. 1740.

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By WILLIAM SMITH, Minister of the Gospel.

LONDON:
Printed by T. BARNES, in Pall-mall.

T O

Sir Richard Brooke, Bart.

*Roger Barnston,
Henry Bennet,
James Manwaring, Jun. } Esqrs.
William Farrell,*

*Mr. Charles Mytton, Mercht. }
Mr. Henry Hesketh, Mercht. } Churchwardens.*

And the rest of the Inhabitants of the Parish of
the *Holy Trinity* in the City of *Chester*;

THIS DISCOURSE

I S

Gratefully address'd,

By

their most Faithful,

and most humble Servant,

W. SMITH.

T O

Sir Richard Brooke, Bart.

Roger Barnham,
Henry Bennett,
James Manning, Junr,
William Parry,

Mr. Charles Norton, Merchant,
Mr. Henry Norton, Merchant,

And the rest of the inhabitants of the Parish
the 15th Trinity in the City of London

This DISCOURSE

Gratefully addressed

and well loved servant,
W. SMITH

PROVERBS xiv. 34.

*Righteousness exalteth a Nation, but Sin is
a Reproach to any People.*

TH E S E Words are one of the Maxims or Sentences of a very wise and celebrated Monarch. Yet their Value and Significance arise not so much from the Royal Dignity of their Author, as from the established Character of him as a Sage, who formed all his Observations upon exact Enquiry and judicious Examination. Maxims so formed are in most cases apt to gain Attention. The Words of any Man famed for Wisdom and Experience are generally heard with Candor. But all the Sentences of this Royal Sage drop the Seeds of Wisdom, at first hearing; and when sedately and particularly inspected and examined, are found to be full of useful Instructions. Like the Alabaster-Box of Ointment, they contain a sweet and grateful Perfume; and like the Box when opened, diffuse their Sweets in a larger Sphere of Influence, and gladden and enliven all around.

How concisely has he taught us here the true and only Method of aggrandizing a People, or of sinking

a Nation into Infamy and Ruin? *Righteousness* (saith he) *exalteth a Nation, but Sin is a Reproach to any People.* National Prosperity dependeth upon national Virtue; as the latter advanceth, so will the former. When the latter decreaseth, the former also will soon decline. When Sin prevails, Reproach will fasten, where Glory, Virtue, and true Reputation have lost their Hold. When Sin is the general Practice, and the national Character once deservedly branded with Infamy and Reproach, that Nation begins to draw towards its Period. The Terrors of a justly-offended Deity soon range themselves in array against it. His Instruments begin to work, the dreadful Instruments I say of offended Deity, whether Plague or Famine, whether intestine Diffensions, or the Ravage of Conquerors, to punish the national Depravation, with publick Calamity always, sometimes with total Ruin.

That these Things are, and that they ought to be, and must be so, I shall give some short, but satisfactory Proof; — and then suitably to the Design of the present Solemnity, shall endeavour to turn our Attention to our own national State, and set the inward Thoughts on a serious Enquiry, — Whether our Righteousness be at present such, as that we may expect a Continuance or Increase of the publick Welfare? — or, whether our Sin be such, as that without early and serious Amendment, we must expect the Reproach of other Nations, and the
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the Vengeance of God, in whatever manner he shall please to inflict it? In these Points all without Exception are concerned, as all are Members of the public Body: and when such a Body rejoices, all the Members rejoice; when it suffers, all its Members must suffer with it.

The Truth of the Assertions in the Text is undeniably proved by the History of all those People, who have hitherto made a Figure in the World, and risen to any high Degree of Power and Dominion. Every Page of the Volumes in which their Story is recorded, shews them to have been prosperous so long as they were virtuous; and so soon as they begin to stray from the Paths of Virtue, and desert the upright Conduct by which their Power was acquired, that Power immediately begins to be awkward and unweildy, their Frame of Empire totters, and at last falls into an Heap of Ruins. Such an Increase and Decrease of publick Prosperity and Power in the regular Gradation, are evidently laid before us in the History of the *Jews*, as recorded in Holy Writ. [They rose at first from an obscure and oppressed People, into a large Extent of Power and Dominion. From that Heighth they quickly fell, when they deserted their God, and trampled under foot his righteous Laws. Whenever their Vices had reduced them to a servile Temper, Captivity was their constant Portion. When Captivity had roused them again from their Lethargy of Sin, they again recovered their Polity; — to lose it again,

when their Sins were ripe for another publick Judgment. Their Calamities grew still more frequent, because their Sins grew more enormous; till being ripe at last for a Weight of Vengeance, they suffered a Series of Woes and Miseries, not to be parallel'd before or since. Their Government as a Nation was totally dissolved, *Jerusalem* razed to the Ground, their Temple burnt to Ashes, and the miserable Remainder, who escaped the Sword of the Conquerors, turned out, as so many Vagabonds, into a World that has ever since despised and oppressed them. They have been for seventeen hundred Years, and are to this Day, a visible Instance of Divine Displeasure against a wicked and impenitent People.

Their Conquerors became in their Turn Objects of equal Vengeance to that which they had been the Instruments of inflicting on the *Jews*. Never was there a People more honest and more virtuous than the *Romans* once were. The corrupt Part of Mankind were soon obliged to own it and obey them. By being Masters of themselves and their own Passions they became the Lords and Masters of the World: But then Prosperity became their Bane. It enervated their Virtue, enfeebled their Minds and corrupted their Morals. They declined progressively as they rose. Their Empire was broke into Ruins, and nothing at last remained but the bare Name of that People; virtuous at first and then great, rich and powerful afterwards, and then corrupted,

rupted, at length reproached and hated for their Vices, and so totally extinguished.

These Instances are so clear and undeniable, and lie so much within the general Knowledge, that they may be sufficient Proofs of the Maxims before us. Not but there is scarce a people either ancient or modern, * which cannot throw in fresh Evidence, if needful.—National Sin hath been, and ever will be a Source of national Calamity. And where the People have been virtuous and good, and the public Welfare built upon the upright Conduct of the whole Body, and supported by the just and honest Demeanor of the several Members; so long as this hath been any where the case, happy hath been that People; Enemies never prevailed against them, Security dwell'd within their Borders, and Righteousness and Peace fixed their Residence amongst them.

* A Person versed in History, and reflecting on the Rise and Fall of Empires, Kingdoms, and Republicks, in a moral and religious Light, will immediately recollect many Instances of this kind. There is no need to point out to such an one, the Growth of the *Persian* Empire under the prudent, generous, and noble Conduct of *Cyrus*, as described by *Xenophon*; the shameful Figure, they afterwards made in *Greece* under *Xerxes*, when the Virtues by which they rose were quite sunk in the luxurious sensual Life; and as they grew still more degenerate, the Dissolution of their Empire, by *Alexander the Great*. The Rise and Fall of the *Macedonian* Power, considered in the same Light, would very much illustrate the Subject. But there is not a more remarkable and glaring Proof of it, than the *Lacedæmonians* can furnish:—In regard to the Moderns, I shall only mention an Answer, full of Piety and good Sense, made by a *French* Officer, who during the Wars between the two Nations, being asked by some *English*, flush'd with Conquest, “When his Nation would gain such Victories over them,” calmly replied, “When your Sins are greater than ours.”

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By the Rule of strict Equity and Justice these Things *ought*, and as the World is under the Government of perfect Wisdom, Justice, and Goodness, they *must* always be so. He who believes a superintending Providence, in his Reflections on Providence, hath his Mind intently fixed on the Almighty Author and Ruler of his own Creation, who governs the material World by a consistent and continued Exertion of Power, by an imperceptible Disposition of second Causes, ordinarily stiled *The Course of Nature*; who, further governs the rational World by a moral Administration; whose Care it is to make Virtue happy, and Vice wretched. The Equity therefore of the Supreme Being is plainly concerned; that, where Virtue is the public Care, a suitable Degree of Happiness should be the public Lot, and the contrary in regard to Vice. Reason, and the common Notions of Equity implanted in every Bosom, may convince every one, that this *ought* to be so: The declared Will of God every where informs us, that this *shall* be so: Fact and Experience clearly demonstrate, that it always *hath been* so.

The Rules of distributive Justice extend as well to a public Body, as to any single or individual Member of that Body. A whole Plantation, as well as any single Tree, is to be known by its Fruits. By these the good and the bad are infallibly to be distinguished. And further, *as every one soweth, so shall he reap*, is equally true of private
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vate Persons, and of whole Communities. Yet the final Exercise of this Justice, (which belongs only to the Supreme Being, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord*) in regard to Communities is discernible; because only to be executed in the present Life. A rational Creature spends only a small Portion of his Existence here: His Character is not compleated, nor his Conduct to be exactly determined, till the present Scene is entirely closed, and he is gone to another State. Whatever Appearances therefore may present themselves before us in regard to Individuals, however the righteous Man may seem destitute and forlorn, however the wicked and immoral may seem to flourish and to triumph here; such Appearances, whatever they may be, are no Imputations on Divine Justice; because Judgment on Particulars is not to be passed in the present State, nor Reward and Punishment to be enforced in the present Life. But the Case is different in regard to whole Communities: because Nations, Kingdoms, and Commonwealths, have Being only in the present State. Present good and present evil are the Ends of national Pursuit and Flight. And as national Blessings are the consequence of national Virtue, and the upright Conduct of those who compose the public Body; so the Rules of Justice reciprocally require, that public Calamities should also be immediate Consequences of Vice or Immorality generally prevailing amongst a People. For a Nation, as a Nation, can only be rewarded

rewarded or punished in the present Life. The Reason was mentioned before ; because it hath only Being in the present State of rational Creatures.

Now to that most just and righteous Being, to whom Vengeance belongeth, the whole Course of Nature is entirely Subject. All second Causes move at his Direction and Will. And all such he makes use of as the Instruments either of rewarding or punishing the Nations of the Earth. In his Will only are determined, and in his Power ultimately lodged, the Means to help and to cast down, to save and destroy. *He increaseth Nations and destroyeth them: He enlargeth the Nations, and straitneth them again; and at what Instant he speaketh concerning a Nation, or a Kingdom, to build and to plant it, or to pluck up, pull down, and destroy it, it shall be done.* Various are the Means he useth, and diverse the Instruments he employeth. Yet as it is now the chief of our Duty to deprecate and avert the Judgments of God, our View shall be confined to the Instruments of these.

— Sometimes *He maketh a fruitful Land barren for the Wickedness of them that dwell therein.* Plenty vanisheth, Scarcity and Want succeed, the Fore-runners of Famine, of Sicknes, and of Death.

— Sometimes *He cometh flying on the Wings of the Wind.* The Face of Nature languisheth, and the most terrible Effects are caused both at Land and Sea by these Blasts of his Displeasure. — Sometimes *The Pestilence walketh before him:* Whilst the

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once chearful and enlivening Rays of the Sun dart down on poor Mortals the most noisome and destructive Plagues. — How often do Rivers rise from their Beds, overflow their Banks, and spread Havoc and Devastation? — How hath the Earth trembled from its Bowels, opened in a dreadful Chasm, and swallowed up whole Cities! — Every Element, and every Meteor, the Lightning, the Rain, the Hail, and the Snow, are ready to fulfill his Pleasure. — At one Time, Vengeance on a wicked People, is executed by the Means of those very Crimes, which render it wicked. Intestine Diffensions shake the public Frame. Magistrates and Subjects are embroiled together. The Father rises against the Son, and the Son against the Father. Who knows not, or at least who cannot guess at, all the Horrors of a civil War? — At another time Nations rise against Nations. Some are the Instruments of destroying others; and when this is performed, are forced in their turn to undergo all the fatal Vicissitudes of Defeat and Conquest. In such Transactions, if the Hand of Providence, or the Finger of God, be not always visible and acknowledged, it is only because Men will not turn their Eyes and Attention towards it. How ingeniously soever some may trace the secondary or immediate Causes, of Dearth and Pestilence from natural Principles, or of Wars and Conquests from the Picques, the Resentment, or the Ambition of Princes, or of People; yet thus the Solution is not

quite finished, since these are still only second Causes. The first Movement belongs to Providence alone. For all Nature is the Art of God: All the Thoughts and Counsels of Men are under his immediate Direction. And whatever, at any time, be the Event, a thinking Mind will find ample Reason to cry out, *Righteous art thou, O Lord, and just are thy Judgments.*

And here it may be proper to particularize the Subject, and to view it more nearly as it interests ourselves. — It is a Business of Importance, which ought never to be long intermitted, and to which the Solemnity of this Day more immediately summons us, seriously to consider the moral and religious State of this Nation, of which, through the Favour of God, we ourselves are Members. For I verily think, that a *Briton* is indebted to the Favour of Providence, even for being born a *Briton*. And were this a Prejudice, yet the Prejudice is honest. — In regard to Laws and Frame of Government, we ought not to envy, for we ourselves are envied by other Nations. — To settle our civil and religious Rites, to guard us from political or spiritual Tyranny, hath been the Work of no little Toil and Labour; and, as we may fairly presume, of no small Integrity and Virtue in our Ancestors. Many have been the Struggles we have undergone, much hath the public Welfare been at Times endangered from foreign Invasions, and intestine Diffensions. But every Storm hath hitherto blown over,
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Freedom hath been preserved, true Religion hath recovered its Seat and Profession amongst us, and for no other People hath the Favour of Providence been so often signalized, as for us.

The Question now is, — Are we worthy of these great and invaluable Blessings? And, do we deserve to have them continued to us? Is our Righteousness such, as that it may intitle us to the Assistance of Providence in our Attempts to preserve them? — Are the generous and public Affections alive and active within us? Do we strictly observe the Rules and Precepts of our Holy Religion, in regard to the Almighty Governor of the Universe, our Superiors on Earth, ourselves and our Inferiors? Do we follow after that Holiness, without which a Community cannot well subsist, without which no reasonable Creature shall see the Lord? Are our Manners irreproachable, and refined from Vice, as Christian Manners ought to be? Are we subject one to another, in Honour preferring one another, as Members of a Society, which is long to flourish, ought to be? Are we temperate in private Life, equitable and sincere in our public Dealings? — Is this the general Temper of the Nation? — If it be, we have nothing to fear. For *tho' the Kings of the Earth may set themselves, and the Rulers take Counsel together*; yet the Almighty will stretch out his Arm in our Behalf, *will bruise them with a Rod of Iron, and dash them in Pieces like a Potters Vessel?*

Is the former a just Representation? or, is our national Character different from this? — Are not our Sins a Reproach and Blemish to us in the Eyes of our Neighbors, and of all thinking Persons amongst ourselves? Is not our Behavior such, that it may rather expect the Vengeance than the Assistance of the Almighty? — Do we not act in Repugnance to the Rules of Morality, and the Precepts of Christ, violate the relative Duties of our Stations, and make frequent Breaches on that inward Harmony, which is the very Life of public Prosperity? Are not our Minds corrupted, and our Morals depraved? Are our Faults the ordinary Faults and Infirmities of human Nature? or, are we not even refined in Vice, too frequently harden'd and deaf to the Calls of Virtue, Religion, and inward Conscience? Is that plain Sincerity, for which our Nation was once so honourably characterized, still in Vogue and Practice amongst us? Is not the gentle and natural Simplicity of Life and Manners quite worn out in every Degree of Men? Is not Religion banished from our Hearts, and, in numerous Instances, from the very Lips and Voice? Why, Immorality and Prophaneness reign even in our Streets. Scarce any other Nation, where Men so often Pillage and Murder one another: No Nation upon Earth, where they so often murder themselves. †

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† This is mentioned, because Self-murder seems at present a Crime peculiar to the *English*, tho' to recite any Instances, would be too melancholly and ungrateful an Employment. I apprehend, it cannot
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What hath a People, so depraved and corrupt, or even not quite so corrupt and depraved, as hath here been described; — what, I say, have they to expect, but that the Declaration of God shall be verified upon them, who hath said — Hear the Words of the Almighty — *My Soul shall be avenged of such a Nation as this.*

How true soever the Reflection may be, it will afford us small Comfort, That our present Enemies may be in no respect more pure or more righteous than ourselves. For who knows, which God may make the Instrument to punish the other? The Times and Seasons of setting up and plucking down are only in the Power of the Almighty. And in regard to either, Vengeance deferred may only be deferred to fall the heavier. Happy indeed they may be, to whom God indulgeth the longest Period for Repentance: Wise they will be, who make the proper Use of such Indulgence, who return and forsake their evil Ways, and qualify themselves for the Mercy and Protection of God.

This should lead our Thoughts to that noble Expedient we have yet in resource; which may

be accounted for from the natural Gloom of Temper, or any Influences of Air and Climate, since these have always been the same; tho' Facts of this kind were never so frequent as in the present Age. It hath been ascribed by Foreigners to false Notions of Honour and inward Greatness; but undoubtedly it is owing to a Want of sound and religious Principles. A true Christian can never be guilty of such a Crime; nor even a Deist, in the true and genuine Sense of the Word: For even on the Principles of the Latter, it may be proved to be the meanest, most abject, and cowardly Procedure, of which a reasonable Creature can be guilty.

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give Strength and Victory to our Enterprizes, and without which Fleets and Armies may avail but little — an earnest and sincere Repentance. What Spectacle can be imagin'd more grateful to God, than a whole People prostrate before him, in humble Supplication, and with contrite Hearts? Our own inward Conscience may long since have summoned us to do, what the Authority of our Sovereign, influenced by Motives of Piety and Wisdom, hath now enjoined us; — To appear before the Presence of God, to implore his Mercy, that in doing this, our Thoughts may be called home to our Bosoms, and every Individual grow sensible, what Share of the national Sin he hath himself to repent of. If every Member would seriously reform, the publick Body would soon become sound and vigorous. God is the only Giver of Victory; but when did he give it to a wicked and impenitent People, unless that Vengeance might afterwards fall the heavier upon them?

Us and all our Fellow-Subjects it highly concerns, to lay these Things to heart, that we may effectually reform our Ways. If we do not, it may in another Age be Pleasure only to our Enemies to relate the Consequence: But if we seriously repent, and our national Temper be reformed, if our Morals are purified; and Pomp and Luxury give Place to the Christian Simplicity and Frugality of Manners; the Pressures of War, tho' seemingly heavy and burdensome, will be chearfully born till the Event
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crown us with present Glory and future Security. Schemes the deepest laid, or best concerted, will never be effectual without the Blessing of God. If therefore we will labour that our religious and moral Behaviour may entitle us to his Blessing, in all our honest Undertakings we may expect Success. — Nations are only to be rewarded and punished as Nations, whence there is no need at present to take in the Motives of future Rewards and Punishments, which have relation only to the Crimes and Virtues of Individuals; — yet hence, the more ardent our Desires to be a flourishing and happy, the more earnest should be our Endeavours to be a religious and righteous People. If we will earnestly labour to be so, our Arms will suffer no Defeat, our Councils no Disappointment. The Cares of our Sovereign will even receive a Recompence; in securing his faithful Subjects from foreign Insults, and their Properties from foreign Depredations. May God, by the Influence of his Holy Spirit, so move our Hearts, that we may repent and become a righteous People in his Sight, that we may be kind and tender-hearted one to another, faithful and loyal to our Prince, and united with him in the Defence of our Religion, Liberties, and Laws. — And may the same gracious Being so influence his Councils, and bless his Undertakings, that He may be, under Almighty Providence, the great and glorious
Instrument

Instrument of true and lasting Prosperity to all his People.

Now to God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed all Honour and Glory, and Dominion and Power, both now and for evermore. Amen.

F I N I S.